

these things take time by apocalypsedreams

Series: [through hell and high tide \[1\]](#)

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Angst, Angst and Hurt/Comfort, F/M, Implied Mental Instability, Mike-Centric, but stay tuned, eleven is gone, everything kind of sucks, no one really knows how to deal with it

Language: English

Characters: Dustin Henderson, Eleven (Stranger Things), Jim "Chief" Hopper, Karen Wheeler, Lucas Sinclair, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Will Byers

Relationships: Eleven & Mike Wheeler, Eleven/Mike Wheeler

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Summary:

November was a ghost, and Mike saw the lack of acknowledgment as a lack of justice.

these things take time

Author's Note:

hello again lovely readers!

this was originally meant to be the first chapter of a bigger story i'm planning, but it kind of turned into its own thing so i decided to write it more as a prologue to a series instead (if i can work out how to do that... i'm still inexperienced on ao3 haha). i know everyone's had their take already on mike's grief of losing el, but i just thought i'd give mine anyways so my series would be clearer and more well-rounded!

sorry for any errors - i just wanted to get this out. without further ado...

As the new year of 1984 signalled separation from the chaos of '83, it was surprising how mute everyone had become.

November was a ghost. Its presence remained and haunted, though no one would mention it. It manifested itself in absurd and chilling ways. In Lucas' sporadic night terrors and sudden monsoons of guilt. In Dustin's abrupt halt to a joke as words somehow became stuck and lodged in his throat. In the slugs Will began throwing up, both constantly and secretly. In the fact that Mike felt void of feeling anything at all.

Perhaps somewhere along the line, there had been an unspoken agreement to never speak of it again – no one was quite sure. Maybe one day, after the jokes and retellings of that significant week, and the tears and anxieties shared over countless sleepovers, there had been a signal – a subtle nod, or a gesture or blink – to say, *“okay, that's enough”*. One day there were no words left, and with the coming of 1984, it hadn't once been mentioned again, even amongst the most talkative group of clever and intuitive young boys. Perhaps it was better that way. But it wasn't as if it had disappeared – the lack of acknowledgment did nothing to simmer that same haunting of that same ghost. They were all affected, still. But no one talked about the ghost. Not a mumble at the dinner table, not a passing remark whenever they biked through Mirkwood (although they had still

agreed no one would travel alone again), not a hush or a whisper after lights out.

Mike thought it an injustice to her.

Eleven and her selfless sacrifice hadn't been spoken of since December, and he felt lousy for letting her pass by so easily. She was stuck in God knows where, or she was dead. No one could save her or protect her from what she had done, but he was confused at how everyone deemed brushing everything under the rug to be the most helpful thing to do in such a situation. Every time he went to speak about her, the words died in his mouth. Every time he rose his hand to knock on Nancy's door on a particularly bad day, keeping their sibling promise of "telling each other everything" in mind, something inside him reprimanded and sagged, and his arm dropped back down to his side. He was lost and chained to himself with the idea of a girl with a shaven head and telekinesis and a lost idea of the world. He so desperately wanted to find it for her, but he no longer knew how to help.

That didn't stop him from trying. Mike would fight against the harsh winter weather day after day and go out into the woods to look for her, calling her name until his voice became raspy and worn, hearing his own cries echo back to him in the empty forest like some sort of mocking torment. He would come back to the motherly telling-off of Karen, who was worried sick from him sneaking out by himself in the cold, sometimes after dark. He carefully maintained the blanket fort in the basement and lined up his supercom next to it perfectly, looking past the worried glances of his three best friends. When there was a power outage, he rushed down there and waited for the crackle of her voice through the stereo. After the third or fourth time of it happening, Nancy's look of pity had turned into annoyance as she would roll her eyes and say "Mike, it's just the weather affecting the electricity again". He wasn't taking any chances.

There were little rituals he would do every fortnight, or every day – things that felt necessary if there was a chance she was still out there. They worried his family and friends, though no one would actively confront him about it. On the night of the three month anniversary of her disappearance, Mike was sneaking down to the blanket fort in the basement and overheard his mother talking to Ted about children's

therapy. She voiced concerns about her son having obsessive-compulsive behaviour.

Mike ignored them. For all they knew, Eleven could be trying her best to come back. She could be there tomorrow, or the day after, or next week, or next month. He was withdrawn, numb, but helplessly hopeful. Occasionally, he'd see Hopper's truck drive by when he was on one of his searches for her; the glint of his chief badge and beige uniform standing out amongst the woods. That gave Mike a spec of hope amongst the morbid situation – perhaps he wasn't the only one who still cared and longed to find El.

But hope wasn't sustainable. It burned out and vanished. His vocal cords would tire of calling out for her, and his growing legs were exhausted with the constant walking and searching after school. When a lamp flickered, he wouldn't flinch. When Hawkins had a bad rainstorm, he put his pillow over his head and went back to sleep. After a while of feeling hope, then false hope, then nothing at all, the boys finally had their old friend back to some extent.

His D&D campaigns had grown uncharacteristically lacklustre and somewhat dull, since all of his time had previously been taken up by Eleven. But in the furiously hot summer of 1984, with the boys despairing over the heat in the somewhat cool basement of the Wheelers' house and lounging on fabric sofas, Mike skipped down the stairs in a striped polo and shorts and slammed his large folder onto the table, creating a stiff breeze. He wiped his upper lip of sweat and sneered, proud and conniving. "So, anyone want to know what happened to the lost knight and the proud princess?"

His one-liner was enough to break the boys out of their feverish stupor, and they cut through the stale air of the basement to reach their respectable chairs as Mike opened his folder and laid the board out, the boys cheering and hollering as the game began.

It hit them, five hours in, that the story Mike had intricately spent weeks crafting was about her. And they hung on his every word.

Eleven was the proud princess, and with the addition of a few thessalhydras, cave systems and trolls, he had painted a detailed tale of their journey with her. The week of November 1983 had been

condensed into a ten hour campaign, and Mike's lip trembled slightly as he narrated the proud princess' gruelling sacrifice for her saviours, venturing into the realm of shadows and the cave of weird flowers. There was a silence after the medal ceremony as the boys sat in the dull light. It was 10:30pm.

They looked between the board and Mike. The fall of night had chilled the air of the basement even further, and combined with the shock of what had just happened after months of pretending it was all a bad dream, they found themselves suddenly cold. Mike had opened their minds and forced them to think about it, and they were glad. He had reminded them of her.

After minutes of awkward shuffling of feet and hands, Dustin was the first to speak. He rose from his chair, moved to the couch, and finally found the words that had been missing for seven months. "Damn. I miss her." And everyone knew what he was talking about.

Lucas bowed his head. "Me too. I was such a dick to her, man. She saved us, helped us find Will, and I treated her like shit-

"She knew you were sorry." Dustin soothed, leaning forward in his seat on the couch. "She forgave you. You don't have to torture yourself over it anymore, it's in the past."

"It doesn't feel like it." Will mumbled, shoulders still hunched over the table. Everyone's eyes moved to him, mournful and apologetic. They understood. "It's been, like, months. But it feels fresh somehow. Like I'll never escape it."

Soon, all the boys were confessing what they had concealed for months in the warmth of each other's company, and amongst the sadness of those memories, Mike felt a deep source of happiness somewhere within him. A hope, flourishing as they relived that week and spoke of Eleven and of the monsters they were consumed by at night. He wasn't the only one. They hadn't forgotten her. They remembered, too.

"I wish I could have met her." Will smiled sadly after a while as the night grew deeper and they got out their sleeping bags, and for a glimpse of a second, Mike almost made a stupid remark about how

one day he still could. The all-too-familiar feeling of hopelessness arose and once again the words died in his mouth, replaced by a heavy lump in his throat. That's how everyone referred to her nowadays – if at all. In past tense. Gone. And it dawned on him with discomfort: she was gone.

And it was obvious she was gone – obvious to everyone else, at least. If that dark and unmoving place was where she was, she didn't stand a chance. Will had barely made it a week. Barb had died in a matter of minutes. Eleven was already frail enough as it was before she was taken into that world, and even if she had opened the gate, the world she had opened was against her. She was gone.

Despite his slow recovery from mourning, Mike still slept in the fort on some nights when the thoughts were overbearing, and still fell asleep amongst the blankets he hadn't washed since November with his supercom, unanswered, in his hand. But she was never coming back.

Months passed until the one-year anniversary of Will's disappearance, and the boys were back in the basement after a D&D campaign. They had decided to have a sleepover in memory of the events of last year, and amongst the bittersweet celebrations, Mike felt numb and withdrawn. That night, he lay awake, tuning in and out of the even breaths of his friends and Dustin's heavy snores, crying silently as he thought about how he had failed her. He sniffed and felt a sudden chill, curling into himself more as he wiped his face. It felt like there was a draught on him – like a ghost of a person was barely there, softly trying to blow the tears off his face with a shivering breath.

In that dimension, she curled up against him, examining his face and crying softly, trying to press her hand up against his freckles, though she knew he wasn't really there. He couldn't see, hear or feel her – she had learnt that over a year of watching from where she was. She sniffed, feeling energy radiating and powering through her, combatting the sadness and cold. Eleven turned around to the gate she had been trying to form over a year; the opening she had fractured piece by piece until she had almost been caught by a monster or her powers had blown out. She felt fully charged, and as she turned back to Mike, watching his soft features crumple in pain, she knew there wasn't a moment to waste. With a frail voice, she

spoke hoarsely in soft determination. "M-Mike..." She breathed. "I'm coming."

Author's Note:

more is coming! and hopefully it's an st story you might not have seen before...?

the title is from a song by the smiths, released in 1984, and the name of the series is 'through hell and high tide', from the smiths song 'what difference does it make?', also released in 1984. as you can see i'm kind of building up a smiths theme... that will continue.

as always, feedback in kudos/comments are ALWAYS appreciated! bye loves!